

# Epigrams in Context: Metrical Inscriptions on Art and Architecture of the Palaiologan Era

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## INTRODUCTION

The numerous epigrams on Byzantine art and architecture preserved only in anthologies offer tantalizing but hazy and elusive glimpses of buildings and works of art that have long since disappeared. Since the poems have become separated from their artistic context and the poet did not so much intend to *describe* as to *evoke* his subject,<sup>1</sup> it can be difficult to visualize the artifact to which he alludes. Any investigation of such poetry of the Palaiologan period must necessarily focus on the most prolific poet of the era, Manuel Philes, who flourished in the first half of the fourteenth century; approximately thirty thousand of his verses are preserved. A rapid skimming of the 1,078 poems of Philes published by Emmanuel Miller and Emidio Martini<sup>2</sup> indicates that almost half of them are devoted to works of art and architecture. This staggering figure of over five hundred dedicatory and ekphrastic epigrams testifies to the profusion of artistic activity in Constantinople during the early decades of the fourteenth century, while the verses themselves suggest a close collaboration among patron, artist, and poet.<sup>3</sup>

Careful analysis of verses that have lost their artistic context, combined with their comparison to pertinent works of art (a hypothetical exercise in which I engage briefly at the conclusion of the article), sometimes enables the reader to conjure up a visual image of the lost work of art alluded to in the poem, but never with any degree of preci-

I should like to thank my art history colleagues who assisted me in locating illustrative materials for this article, especially Martin Dennert, Sharon Gerstel, and Natalia Teteriatnikov. Thanks are also due to Henry Maguire and the two anonymous reviewers who read and commented on an earlier version of the article. Unless otherwise specified, the translations of the epigrams are my own.

<sup>1</sup>On a related topic, see the article of L. James and R. Webb, "‘To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places’: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14 (1991): 1–17, which argues that *ekphraseis* were "attempts to convey the spiritual truth residing in art" (p. 14). For a nuanced response to this article, focusing on epigrams, see H. Maguire, *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response* (Toronto, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>E. Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1855–57), and E. Martini, *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita* (Naples, 1900); in the footnotes below each epigram of Philes is identified by its numbering in the manuscript in which it is found (e.g., Escorial, no. 281), as well as by the page number of the edited version. A critical edition of the entire corpus is currently in preparation by Gunther Stickler and Hans Veit Beyer.

<sup>3</sup>For analysis of a group of Philes's poems on ex-voto offerings to the Pege shrine in Constantinople, see A.-M. Talbot, "Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges and Its Art," *DOP* 48 (1994): 135–65.

sion. On occasion the title or lemma, which generally precedes Philes's poems, may provide the reader with additional information. Here are a few examples: "On the great Demetrios represented on a stone with red veins," "On the <image of> St. George carved from white stone at the Mangana monastery," "On an icon of the Lord with a frame of pearls on a black background."<sup>4</sup> These titles can be helpful as aids to comprehension of the verses, especially when they specify the identity of the sacred figure represented, the medium of the work of art, its location, or its patron.

Readers of those poems of Philes that are no longer attached to works of art are faced with a number of puzzling questions, such as the problem of whether the epigrams found in the anthologies were "inscriptional" epigrams, once painted, carved, or incised on buildings and objects—or whether they were "literary" epigrams, intended as separate poems to accompany, rather than adorn, a work of art.<sup>5</sup> The titles of the epigrams are ambiguous on this point: they generally begin with the preposition *εις*, as in the phrase *εις τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, which can be variously interpreted as meaning "addressed to the icon of St. Demetrios," or "on [in the sense of 'about'] the icon of St. Demetrios," or "located on the icon of St. Demetrios." Apparently the preposition could have all three meanings, depending on the context; but in at least a few cases we can be certain that the title is describing the *location* of the epigram. Thus, Philes's verses on the parekklesion of the Constantinopolitan church of the Virgin Pammakaristos are clearly labeled in the manuscript: "[Verses written] on behalf of the *protostratorissa*, on the cornice (*εις τὸν κοσμήτην*) of the church which she built upon the death of her husband."<sup>6</sup> The internal evidence of the epigrams strongly supports the supposition that many of them were intended for placement on the actual object described or on a surrounding frame. Some epigrams address the viewer directly as if the object is speaking; in others the poet uses such telltale words or phrases as "here," "this man," or "these verses," implying that the epigram was inscribed on the object.

Another puzzle is the varying length of the poems in Philes's anthology. It is not difficult to imagine a couplet or a quatrain adorning a work of art even of modest size, but what are we to make of longer poems of twelve or even twenty-four lines? Could they be accommodated by an icon frame or a marble tombstone?

Yet another problem, arising when one reads verses divorced from the work of art on which they were once inscribed, is that it is difficult to appreciate fully the relationship between words and image and to understand how the poem may have enhanced or reflected the viewer's aesthetic or spiritual response.

# I. THE EVIDENCE OF SURVIVING INSCRIPTIONAL EPIGRAMS

To address some of these issues, let us turn to a select group of surviving inscriptional epigrams by Philes and other, anonymous poets, whose verses are still preserved *in situ*, on either objects or buildings. It is not my intention to present a comprehensive survey

<sup>4</sup>Escorial, no. 281, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:136–37; and Florence, nos. 34, 230, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:210, 433.

<sup>5</sup>The terminology of inscriptional and literary epigrams is that of Marc Lauxtermann ("The Byzantine Epigram in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries" [Ph.D. diss., Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1994], esp. 21, 26, 30–32, 55–70), whose research supports Wolfram Hörandner's thesis that many (or most) ecphrastic and dedicatory epigrams were actually inscribed on works of art.

<sup>6</sup>Escorial, no. 223, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:117–18.

of such epigrams,<sup>7</sup> but rather to examine a few poems that adorn churches and works of art of various functions and in different media, in an attempt to characterize the relationship among object, artist, poet, patron, and viewer. One of the aims of my inquiry is to demonstrate that poems of substantial length could be inscribed on structures and objects of all sizes and types, from funerary monuments to tiny reliquaries.

#### *A. Epigrams on Funerary Monuments*

1. *Parekklesion of the Church of Pammakaristos.* The parekklesion of the church of the Virgin Pammakaristos in Constantinople (Fig. 1) vividly illustrates the incorporation of lengthy epigrams into an architectural context. The monastery church, originally built in the twelfth century, was restored in the thirteenth century by the general and military governor Michael Tarchaneiotes Glabas and his wife, Maria. Upon Glabas's death, ca. 1305, his widow, who took the veil, added a parekklesion or funerary chapel to the south side of the church as a mausoleum for her husband. She evidently commissioned Manuel Philes to produce for the chapel a series of epigrams, some of which are still preserved *in situ*.<sup>8</sup>

Most impressive is the twenty-three-line epitaph carved on the exterior string course of the parekklesion. The first eight verses, on the west facade where the main door was situated, have now been obscured by the later construction of an ambulatory, but thirteen of the remaining fifteen lines on the south facade can still be read (Fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> This epigram can safely be attributed to Philes since it is also preserved in the Escorial anthology of his poems.<sup>10</sup> It is one of the very few epigrams by Philes that can still be seen on the object (in this case a building) for which it was destined, and it illustrates how an actual carved inscription, 21 m in length, makes a much greater aesthetic impact on the viewer than a text in a manuscript or a printed page of a modern anthology. The carefully carved letters, prominent punctuation marks, and decorative ligatures are as much an ornamental feature of the church facade (Fig. 3) as the brick patterns and blind arcades.

Curiously, the epitaph, addressed to Michael by his widow, never mentions his name but alludes to him only by his title of *protostrator*. The poem says virtually nothing about the chapel itself except that it was built of stone; rather, it eulogizes the brave general who took the monastic habit before his death, and informs visitors that the parekklesion was built by Glabas's widow, now the nun Martha, to house his remains. The visitor who wished to read the entire epigram would have to walk along two sides of the chapel, no doubt craning his neck to make out the letters. As suggested by Amy Cassens Papalexandrou in another context,<sup>11</sup> the viewer would probably have spoken the verses out loud as

<sup>7</sup>Such a corpus is currently in preparation by Wolfram Hörandner.

<sup>8</sup>H. Belting, C. Mango, and D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1978), 3–22.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 16, 20, 33; C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, "Report on Field Work in Istanbul and Cyprus, 1962–1963," *DOP* 18 (1964): 327, 330–31.

<sup>10</sup>Escorial, no. 223, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:117–18. The inscription has never been properly published. For a line drawing of the surviving verses of the inscription and an English translation of the entire poem, see A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London, 1912), 157–60.

<sup>11</sup>In a paper delivered at Ohio State University in October 1994, entitled "Medieval Wordpower and the Inscriptions of Skripou." I am grateful to her for letting me read a typescript of this paper. She also pursues this line of argument in a recently completed Ph.D. dissertation at Princeton University, "The Church of the Virgin of Skripou: Architecture, Sculpture and Inscriptions in Ninth-Century Byzantium."

he slowly deciphered the ligatures and abbreviations; thus he would have performed a kind of ritual recitation in memory of the deceased *protostrator*.

As the visitor proceeded inside the parekklesion, he would pass through the narthex into the chapel proper. Here he would no doubt first focus on the apse mosaic of Christ Hyperagathos, the Supremely Good, which lay straight ahead (Fig. 4). In the conch a three-line epigram frames the image of the seated Christ (Fig. 5); it reads:

On behalf of her husband Michael Glabas,  
Who was a champion and worthy *protostrator*,  
Martha the nun [has offered] this pledge of salvation to God.<sup>12</sup>

With these verses the widow again reminds the visitor of her patronage of the chapel, names her late husband, and states that she constructed the parekklesion to help ensure his salvation. Since the image of Christ forms part of a Deesis scene, one can interpret the iconography of the apse as depicting the Virgin and John the Baptist interceding with Christ for the salvation of Glabas in response to Maria-Martha's generous dedication to Christ of a splendidly decorated chapel.

A third metrical inscription, painted in gold letters on a blue background, ornaments the lower and upper cornices of the church interior (Figs. 6, 7). It is so badly damaged that photos cannot do it justice, but it must have been a colorful decorative element when the parekklesion was new. According to the reconstruction by Arthur H. S. Megaw, the poem was twenty-seven lines long.<sup>13</sup> Beginning on the south side of the lower cornice, it continued along the west and north walls of the parekklesion, with five verses in each section. One should note that the painted lower cornice on the south and west sides of the parekklesion, separating two zones of the wall decoration, corresponds exactly to the location of the carved inscription on the exterior cornice. The poem then moved to the cruciform upper cornice, with one verse on each of the twelve cornice sections. If my calculations are correct, the total running length of the inscription would have been 42 m!

The fragmentary remains indicate that it was yet another epitaph on the death of Glabas, praising the departed general and praying for Christ's blessing upon him. As on the exterior, the spectator who wished to read the epitaph would have had to exert some physical effort, either walking twice around the chapel, gazing upward at the two cornices, or perhaps, since the chapel is so small, merely turning around slowly in place. Sounding out the verses, the viewer would have thus uttered praises of Glabas, whose tomb was probably located in an arcosolium in the north wall,<sup>14</sup> and would have addressed prayers for the *protostrator* to Christ whose mosaic image dominated the apse.

Although the two inscriptions from the interior are not preserved in any anthologies of Philes's poems, another poem, originally intended for the Pammakaristos parekklesion

<sup>12</sup>On this mosaic and the inscription, see Belting, Mango, and Mouriki, *Pammakaristos*, 21, 45, 54–58. The translation is by C. Mango.

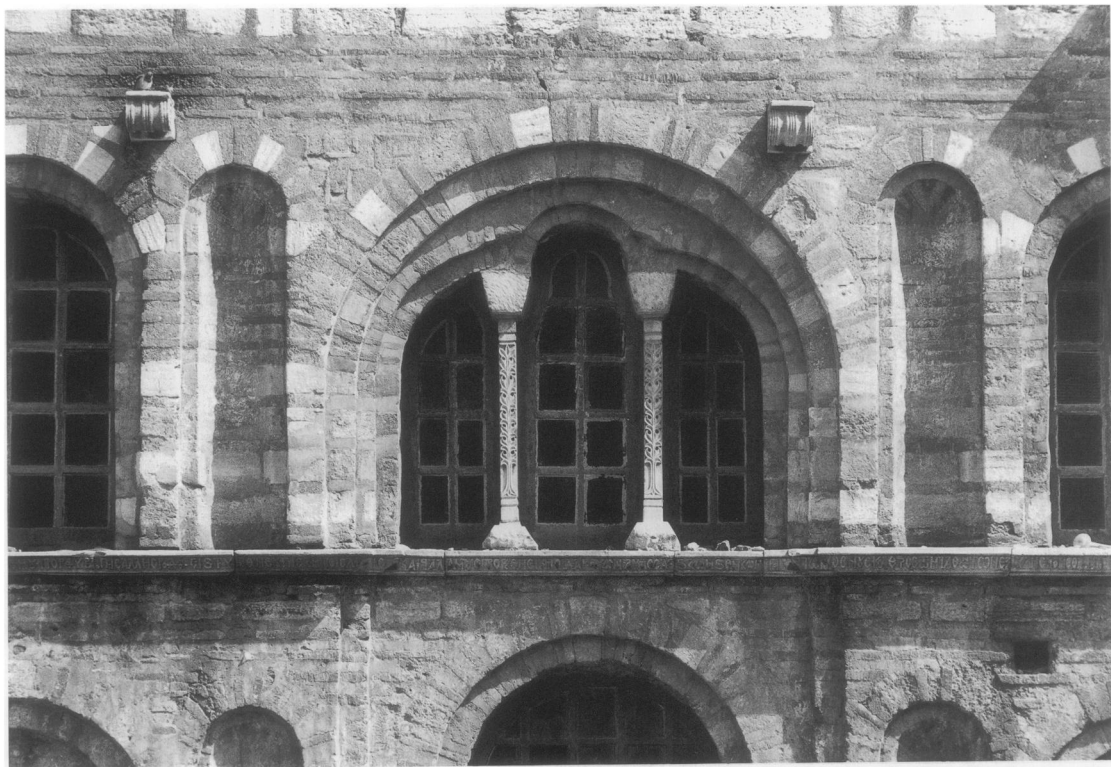
<sup>13</sup>A. H. S. Megaw, "Notes on Recent Work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul," *DOP* 17 (1963): 367–71. He includes a drawing of all surviving parts of the inscription (figs. M, N). See also Belting, Mango, and Mouriki, *Pammakaristos*, 16.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.





1 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, south facade (photo: T. Mathews)



2 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, inscribed epigram on the south facade cornice (photo: T. Mathews)



3 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, detail of the inscribed epigram on the cornice  
(photo: C. Mango)



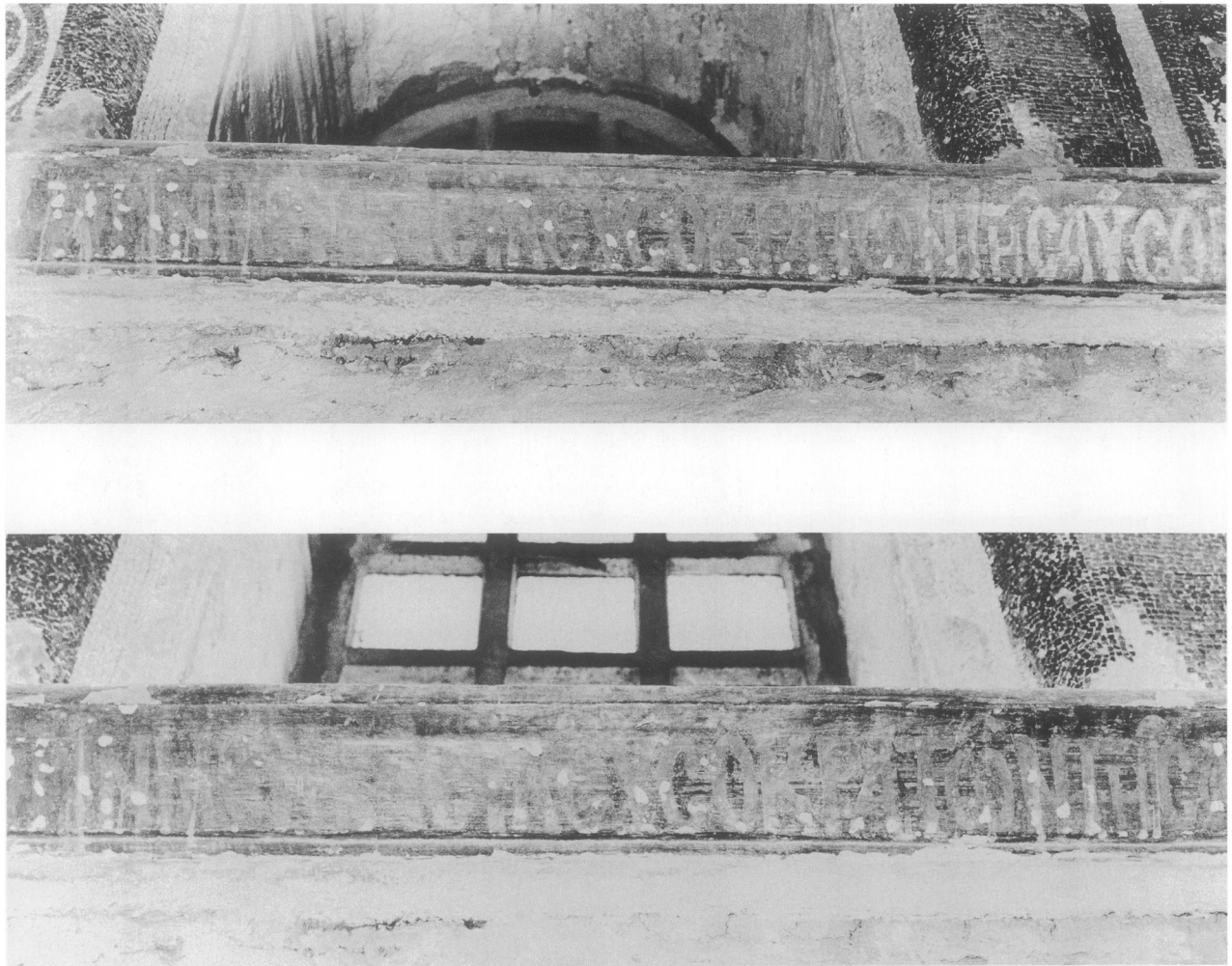
4 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, interior, looking toward the apse



5 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, apse mosaic of Christ Hyperagathos

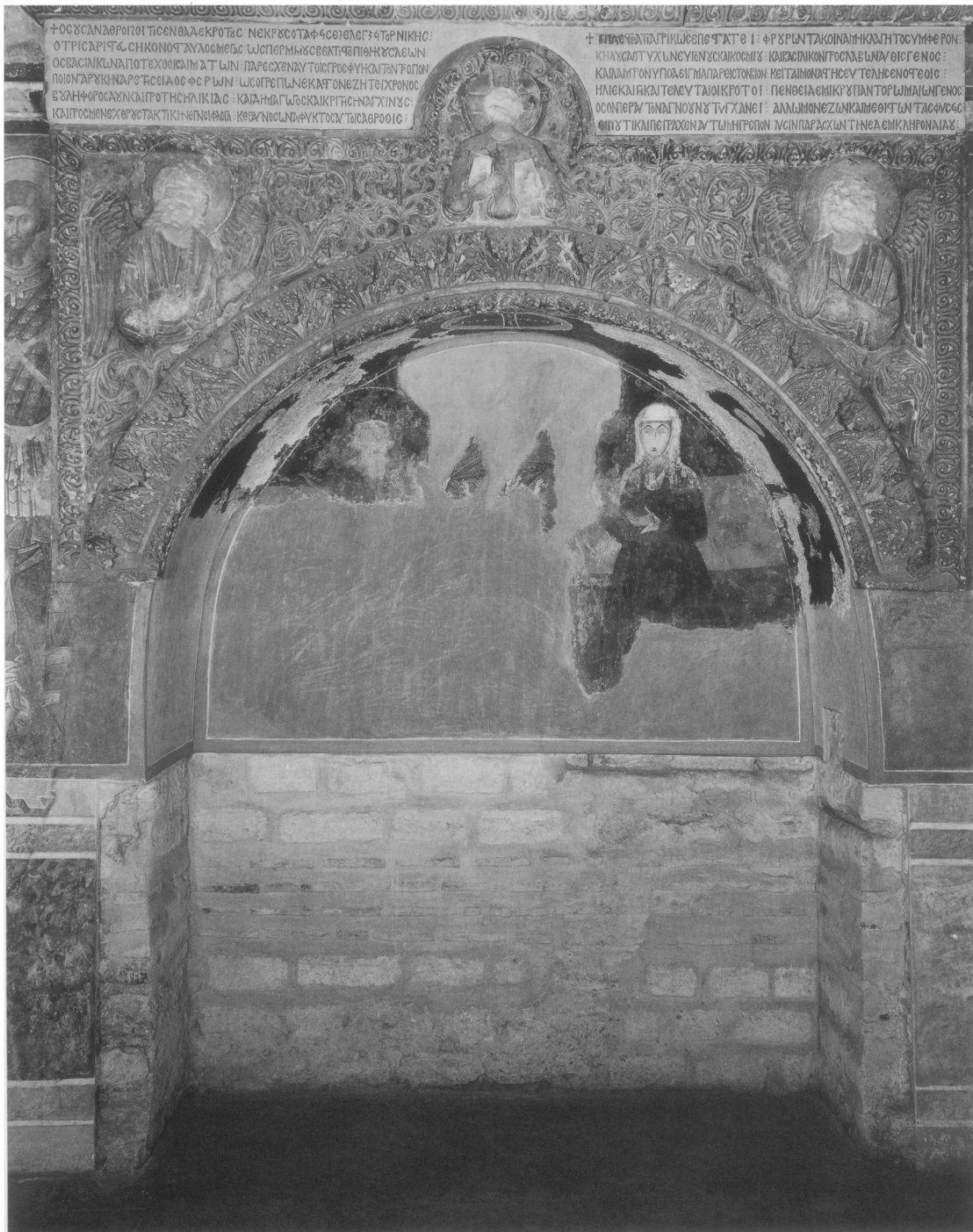


6 Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, interior view with cornices and the arcosolium for the tomb of Michael Tarchaneiotēs Glabas



7 (a, b) Parekklesion of the church of Pammakaristos, Istanbul, details of the interior cornice with the painted epigram

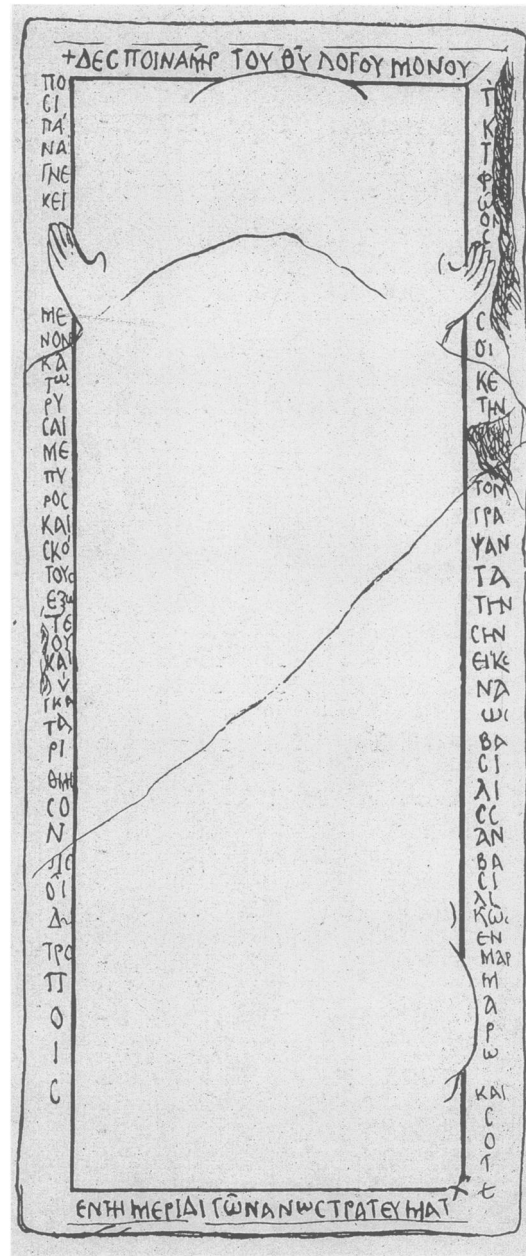




8 Parekklesion of the church of the Chora monastery, Istanbul, tomb of Michael Tornikes



9 Funeral stele of Maria Palaiologina, Archaeological Museum, Istanbul (photo: I. Ševčenko)





12 Icon of the Virgin with a silver-gilt frame, Freising cathedral, Treasury (after A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du moyen âge* [Venice, 1975], fig. 39)





13 Icon of the Virgin with a silver-gilt frame, Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow (after A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* [Leningrad, 1985], fig. 252)



14 Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria with a silver-gilt frame, Vatopedi monastery, Mt. Athos (after Grabar, *Revêtements*, fig. 47)



15 Reliquary casket from Trebizond, Treasury of San Marco, Venice (after D. Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* [Milan, 1984], 201)

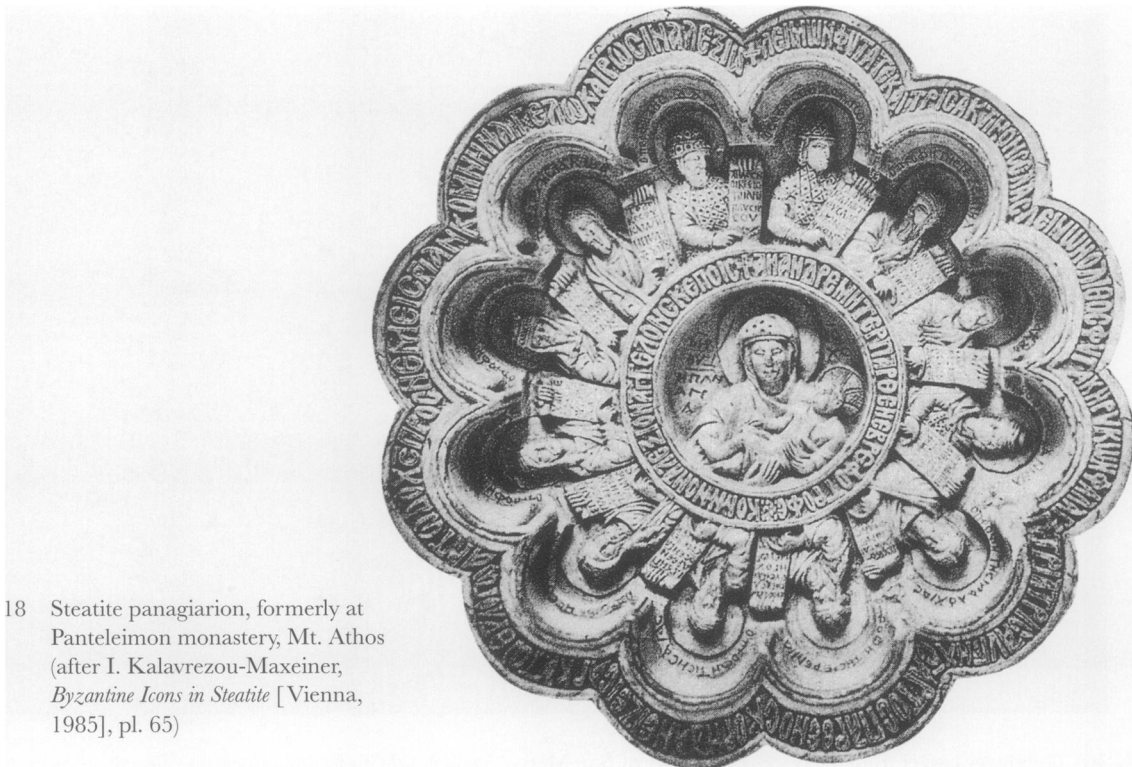


16 Reliquary casket from Trebizond, Treasury of San Marco, Venice, side view (after Buckton, *Treasury of San Marco*, 202)





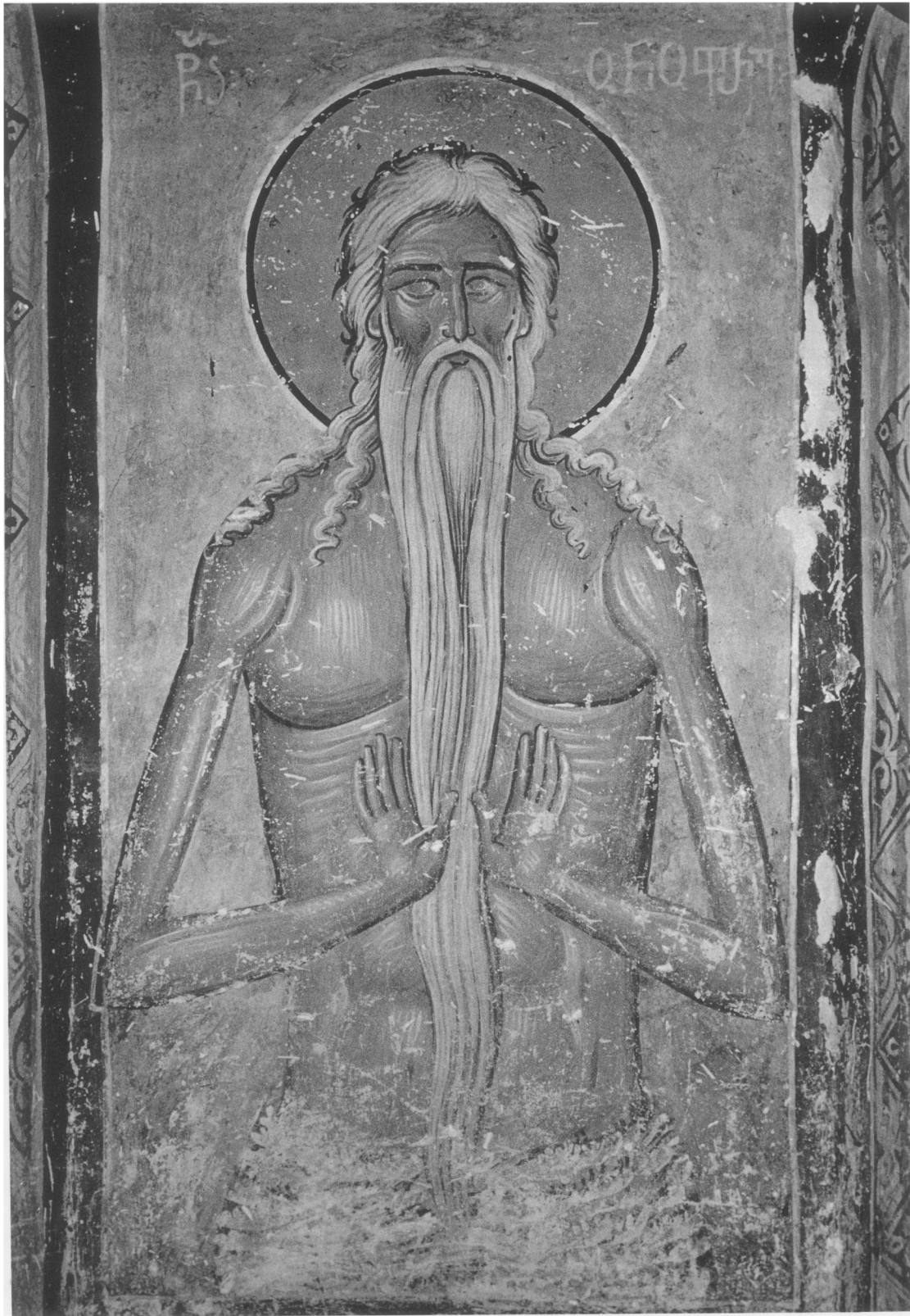
17 Enamel reliquary of St. Demetrios,  
Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.



18 Steatite panagiaron, formerly at  
Panteleimon monastery, Mt. Athos  
(after I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner,  
*Byzantine Icons in Steatite* [Vienna,  
1985], pl. 65)



19 Miniature mosaic icon of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.



20 Fresco of St. Onouphrios by Manuel Eugenikos, church of Calendžicha (photo: N. Teteriatnikov)



21 Rock-crystal cameo of Christ, Benaki Museum, Athens (after A. R. Bromberg, *Gold of Greece: Jewelry and Ornaments from the Benaki Museum* [Dallas, Tex., 1990], pl. 65)



22 Framed heliotrope cameo of Christ, Kremlin, Moscow (after Bank, *Byzantine Art*, fig. 152)





23 Sardonyx cameo of St. George and St. Demetrios blessed by Christ, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris (after J. Durand et al., *Byzance: L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* [Paris, 1993], fig. 193)



but never used, does appear in the Escorial collection of Philes's epigrams;<sup>15</sup> it is therefore highly probable that the surviving mosaic and painted epigrams were by his hand. Also to be found in his anthologies are other metrical inscriptions commissioned by the Glabas family for the Pammakaristos complex, for example, its hospital and entrance gate, as well as a series of narrative paintings presenting the highlights of Glabas's military career.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up, the three surviving inscriptions at Pammakaristos, executed in three media—carved stone, mosaic tesserae, and blue and gold paint—performed both a decorative and an organizational function. They added sculptural detail to the exterior cornice, and colorful ornament to the interior ones. Moreover, these inscriptions might frame a mosaic or accentuate the division into zones of exterior and interior wall surfaces. At the same time they served a commemorative and intercessory purpose: not only did they remind the viewer of the glorious achievements of Michael Glabas and the devotion of his widow who had dedicated his mausoleum to Christ in hope of her husband's future salvation, but they also encouraged the visitor's prayers for the soul of the deceased.

2. *Tomb of Michael Tornikes at the Chora Monastery (Kariye Cami).* At Pammakaristos the entire parekklesion served as a funerary monument for Glabas (and probably eventually for his widow). Other funerary chapels housed the tombs of several individuals, for whom separate arcosolia might be reserved. I limit myself to two examples from Constantinople, examining first the tomb of Michael Tornikes at the Chora Monastery (Kariye Cami).<sup>17</sup> The Grand Constable Tornikes was a counselor of Andronikos II and served as ambassador to the Serbian court in 1327.<sup>18</sup> His tomb, located in the south wall of the parekklesion, has lost a substantial part of its decoration. The main lunette panel, originally in mosaic, depicted Tornikes and his wife, in secular garb, flanking the Virgin and child (Fig. 8). The mosaic portraits of the couple were replaced with fresco images at some later date in the Palaiologan era. The soffit arch preserves, at least in part, the original mosaic portraits of the couple after they took the monastic habit; they are identified as the monk Makarios and the nun Eugenia.

The elaborate sculpted decoration of the upper portion of the tomb is in much better shape; only the faces of Christ and the two angels have suffered damage. The accompanying epigram, incised in stone, is in virtually pristine condition. The poem is of twenty-four verses, arranged two to a line, so that verses 1–12 are on the left side of Christ, and verses 13–24 on the right. The end of each verse is neatly indicated by three dots, the letters are carefully carved, and great attention has been given to the spacing of the letters, especially on the left where the last four lines conform to the curve of Christ's

<sup>15</sup> Escorial, no. 219, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:115–16. This is an example of "trial pieces," multiple versions of epigrams composed by the poet from which the patron would select one; cf. Maguire, *Byzantine Epigram*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Florence, no. 98, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:280–82; and Florence, no. 119, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:310 (for the lemma, see Martini, *Carmina*, 47). For more on the Glabas family's patronage of Philes, see Belting, Mango, and Mouriki, *Pammakaristos*, 12–13, 16.

<sup>17</sup> P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 4 vols. (New York, 1966; Princeton, N.J., 1975), 1:276–80; see also plates, 3:537–39; the translation of the poem is by A. Van Millingen. See also Ø. Hjort, "The Sculpture of Kariye Camii," *DOP* 33 (1979): 250–55.

<sup>18</sup> *PLP* 12, no. 29132.

halo. The poet, probably to be identified with Manuel Philes,<sup>19</sup> eulogizes Tornikes for his military prowess, his service to the state, and his marriage to a highborn woman; then, at lines 17–18, he abruptly shifts the tone to comment:

And leaving his life as a splendid example,  
He lies a poor monk among bones,

thus drawing the viewer's attention to his monastic portrait and to his sarcophagus (now missing).

Much of the poem is addressed to the visitor who seeks to learn the history of the man buried in the niche, but the final three lines shift course to invoke the name of Christ (whose bust is directly to the left), begging Him to be merciful to the deceased and to grant him admission to Paradise. There is one curious disjunction between the poem and the images: Tornikes' wife (whose secular name we do not know) is given equal billing with her husband in the double portraits, but is scarcely mentioned in the poem, except for the two verses (15–16) that comment on Tornikes' "highly born and seemly marriage connection."

3. *Funerary Stele of the Nun Maria.* Another Constantinopolitan funerary epigram inscribed in stone is preserved on a fragmentary marble plaque presently located in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul (Fig. 9).<sup>20</sup> Its original provenance is unknown, but it may have come from the south church or mausoleum of the Lips monastery (Fenari Isa Cami).<sup>21</sup> The first editor of the stele, William Buckler, argued that its unworn surface suggested that it had initially been built into a wall. A standing female figure is accompanied by an inscription, which originally was at least fourteen lines long, and may have been twice that length, if Buckler is correct in hypothesizing that the figure was once flanked by an inscription on both sides. On the basis of letter forms, he dated the stele to 1275–1325. The verses, in the first person, purportedly written by the nun Maria, boast of her Palaiologan lineage, lament obscure past sorrows, and supplicate Christ to receive her into His heavenly bridal chamber. Buckler assumed that the sculpted figure was Maria, while the authors of the recent sculpture catalogue of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul are more cautious, suggesting that the figure might be the Virgin.<sup>22</sup> Since Maria's poem addresses Christ rather than the Virgin, I would argue that the image is more likely to be that of the deceased nun.

It is noteworthy that this relatively small stele, originally perhaps 1 m in height, was able to accommodate a poem that may have contained twenty-eight to thirty verses. One should also remark the careful carving of the letters, decorative ligatures, and the exuberant letter ξ. Judging from the amount of space occupied by the epigram and the care of execution, one feels that the metrical inscription was deemed as important as the

<sup>19</sup>Cf. I. Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in Underwood, *Kariye Djami* (as above, note 17), 4:21 n. 14.

<sup>20</sup>W. H. Buckler, "The Monument of a Palaiologina," in *Mélanges offerts à m. Gustave Schlumberger*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1924), 2:521–26; N. Firathi, *La sculpture byzantine figurée au Musée archéologique d'Istanbul* (Paris, 1990), 67, no. 115.

<sup>21</sup>T. Macridy, "The Monastery of Lips (Fenari Isa Camii) at Istanbul," *DOP* 18 (1964): 271 and n. 64.

<sup>22</sup>A. Grabar (*Sculptures byzantines de Constantinople*, vol. 2, *Sculptures byzantines du moyen âge, XIe–XIVe siècle* [Paris, 1976], no. 128) also identifies the figure as the Virgin.

image by the patron who commissioned it. The first-person voice of the epigram also served to enhance the efficacy of the prayer that the nun addressed to Christ from her grave:

Receive me, Christ, [my] handsome bridegroom;  
 Heeding the intercession of Thy mother,  
 Open for us the spiritual bridechamber.  
 Clothe us in the garment of divine marriage,  
 And place us in the ranks of your [fellow] banqueters.  
 I, the nun Maria, faithful *sebeste*  
 And daughter of a Palaiologos, write these words.

### *B. Epigrams on Icons and Icon Frames*

1. *Marble Bas-Relief of the Virgin Episkepsis from the Makrinitissa Monastery.* Moving from funerary monuments to works of religious art, I next examine a selection of icons and icon frames that bear metrical donor inscriptions. One might begin with an extremely rare example of a marble icon, a bas-relief plaque of the Virgin as Oxeia Episkepsis, “swift visitation,” with a medallion of the Christ Child in front of her chest (Figs. 10, 11).<sup>23</sup> It originally belonged to the Thessalian monastery of the Oxeia Episkepsis, founded by Constantine Maliasenos at Makrinitisa on Mt. Pelion in the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

The plaque is of special interest because it contains both the small figure of the monk donor praying at the Virgin’s feet and, on the marble frame, his metrical invocation of the Virgin. Unfortunately, the inscription was already damaged by 1924 when it was first published, so that it cannot be restored in its entirety. The poem was eight to nine lines in length,<sup>25</sup> with the first verse, which invoked the Virgin, at the top of the marble slab. The poem continued down the left side of the frame, then went across the bottom, and concluded on the right side. The words on the sides of the frame are more difficult to decipher since each one is broken up into fragments of two to three letters—all that the narrow width of the frame would accommodate. A similar arrangement of letters on the side panels can be found on the painted thirteenth-century icon of the Virgin Dexiokratousa from Mt. Sinai.<sup>26</sup>

In the Makrinitisa epigram the monk donor prays to the Virgin for salvation from hellfire and for admission to the heavenly hosts in return for his commissioning of her image in marble. The monk’s name was either omitted from the poem or is illegible. Georgios Soteriou dates the plaque to the thirteenth century and suggests that the donor was a member of the Maliasenos family.

<sup>23</sup>N. Giannopoulou, “Αἱ παρὰ τὴν Δημητριάδα βυζαντιναὶ μοναί,” *Ἐπ. Ἑτ. Βυζ. Σπ.* 1 (1924): 237–40. The fullest publication, best photographic reproduction, and most accurate rendering of the inscription are to be found in G. Soteriou, “Βυζαντιναὶ ἀνάγλυφοι εἰκόνες,” in *Recueil d’études dédiées à la mémoire de N. P. Kondakov* (Prague, 1926), 133–36. I am indebted to Sharon Gerstel, who first drew my attention to this plaque. Unfortunately, no decent photograph exists because the relief, first published in 1924, has since been badly damaged in an earthquake.

<sup>24</sup>See A.-M. Talbot, “Makrinitissa Monastery,” *ODB* 2:1273–74.

<sup>25</sup>Most of the lines are dodecasyllables, but two can perhaps be restored as decasyllables. I thank Lee Sherry for his advice on the meter.

<sup>26</sup>K. A. Manafis, ed., *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens, 1990), fig. 62.

2. *The Freising Icon Frame.* Metal icon frames were frequently added to icons as adornment and protection. Usually of silver or silver gilt, they represented a substantial and long-lasting pious donation. Epigrams inscribed on these frames were often better preserved than those painted on the original icons, and thus ensured the perpetuation of the donor's name and the sentiments of the verses. Such frames also protected the vulnerable edges of icons in wood and especially those in steatite, which was a soft and inherently fragile stone.<sup>27</sup>

Icon frames lent themselves particularly to the inclusion of epigrams. Not only could they accommodate quite lengthy poems, as we shall see, but, being an adornment added to an icon after its creation, they offered more time for the patron and the poet to devise a suitable theme related to its iconography and materials. I begin with the well-known silver-gilt example preserved at the cathedral in Freising (Fig. 12). Attributed to the thirteenth century, the frame surrounds an eleventh-century icon of the Virgin.<sup>28</sup> The fourteen dodecasyllable verses may be translated thus:

The yearning of my soul, and silver, and thirdly gold  
Are [here] offered to you, the pure Virgin.  
However, silver and gold by nature  
Could be stained since they are of perishable material,  
Whereas the yearning of an immortal soul  
Could not be stained nor come to an end.  
For even if this body should dissolve in Hades,  
It continues to entreat you for the mercy of its soul.  
These words are addressed to you  
By Manuel Dishypatos, *kanstrisios*<sup>29</sup> and deacon.  
Receive them compassionately, O Virgin,  
And grant in return that through your entreaties  
I may traverse this ephemeral life without sorrow,  
Until you show the end of the day and light.

To summarize, Manuel Dishypatos,<sup>30</sup> the donor of the silver-gilt icon frame, addresses the Virgin depicted in the icon, hoping that in exchange for his gift she will grant him a peaceful life on earth and eternal salvation. At the same time he notes that the third element of his gift, his spiritual love for the Virgin, is eternal, while the gold and silver are perishable.

The fourteen lines of the poem are divided among ten panels, notable for their proportions; they are larger than the enamel medallions and together take up more than

<sup>27</sup>Cf. I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite* (Vienna, 1985), 1:28–31; she also argues that the frames “made these icons of relatively small size more impressive and emphasized the preciousness of the objects within” (p. 30). Such frames can still be seen on steatite icons of St. Demetrios preserved in Moscow and Paris; *ibid.*, 198–200 and 201–2, nos. 124 and 127, pls. 59 and 62. The Kremlin frame is original; the Louvre frame was made later, after the icon had been broken. Few such frames survive, but the reverse of some steatite plaques preserves indications that they were once framed; cf. *ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>28</sup>For the dates of the icon and the frame, see A. Legner, ed., *Ornamenta Ecclesiae: Kunst und Künstler der Romanik* (Cologne, 1985), 3:171–72. See also A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du moyen âge* (Venice, 1975), 41–43, no. 16; C. Wolters, “Beobachtungen am Freisinger Lukasbild,” *Kunstchronik* 17 (1964): 85–91; M. Kalligas, “Βυζαντινὴ φορητὴ εἰκὼν ἐν Freising,” *Ἀρχ. Ἐφ.* (1937): 501–6.

<sup>29</sup>A patriarchal official; cf. A. Kazhdan, “Kastresios,” *ODB* 2:1111–12.

<sup>30</sup>Perhaps to be identified with Manuel Opsaras Dishypatos, the 13th-century metropolitan of Thessalonike; *PLP* 3, no. 5543.

half the frame. The letters are nielloed, and often include breathings and accents; ligatures are used as necessary to compress a verse in order for it to fit into a panel. The top and bottom panels of the frame hold two lines apiece, while each panel on the sides accommodates one verse. The arrangement of verses differs from that on the Makrinitza marble icon. The first four verses are at the top; the poem then continues with verses 5–7 in the three panels on the right side, while verses 8–10 are on the left side. The final four lines are at the bottom. On the Makrinitza panel, in contrast, the poem moved from top to left to bottom, ending on the right side. As a result of the arrangement of the panels on the Freising frame, the verses in which Manuel states his name and titles are in the two lower left panels, a location that corresponds more or less to the placement of the figural donor panel on the icon frame in the Tretyakov Gallery, which was presented by Constantine Akropolites and his wife (Fig. 13).<sup>31</sup> Akropolites, identified by a prose inscription, extends his hands in prayer and offering to the Virgin, whereas Manuel makes similar gestures of prayer and offering through the medium of verse.

3. *The Vatopedi Icon Frame.* Yet another metrical dedicatory inscription is preserved on a fourteenth-century silver-gilt revetment at Vatopedi which adorns an icon of the Virgin Hodegetria. The epigram commemorates the gift of the frame by a certain Papadopolina in honor of her sister, and contains a prayer for the grace of the Lord to descend upon the two siblings.

One should note the different spatial arrangement of the epigram: the twelve verses are divided between two panels at the bottom of the revetment (Fig. 14).<sup>32</sup> If the patron had so wished, the artisan could have easily fitted another twelve lines at the top of the frame. I would conclude that there would have been no problem in accommodating poems of up to twenty-four verses on icon frames or revetments.

### C. *Epigrams on Reliquaries*

1. *The Reliquary Casket from Trebizond.* Reliquaries, like icons, were often enhanced by donors with inscriptional epigrams; a fine example is the silver-gilt reliquary casket of the late fourteenth or the fifteenth century from Trebizond, now in the Treasury of San Marco in Venice (Figs. 15, 16).<sup>33</sup> The casket, 28 cm in length, has figurative imagery only on the lid, where an enthroned Christ is depicted, flanked by four standing saints, Eugenios, Valerianos, Kanidios, and Aquila, martyred at Trebizond under Diocletian. One can assume that the casket once held relics of these martyrs, and was originally housed in one of the principal churches of Trebizond, perhaps at the *katholikon* of the monastery of St. Eugenios.<sup>34</sup> The four sides of the casket are ornamented with six bands of decoration, two of which contain an engraved and nielloed metrical inscription. Its verses may be translated as follows:

<sup>31</sup> Grabar, *Revêtements*, 45–46, no. 18; A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad, 1985), 317 and figs. 252–54.

<sup>32</sup> Grabar, *Revêtements*, 49–52, no. 21.

<sup>33</sup> D. Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan, 1984), 201–3, no. 28.

<sup>34</sup> On the monastery of St. Eugenios, see A. Bryer and D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos* (Washington, D.C., 1985), 222–24, and J. O. Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous Dionysiou 154* (Uppsala, 1996), 81–85.

You martyrs did not fear to shed your blood  
 But contended with all your might;  
 I am speaking of the unbending pillars of the East,  
 The gleaming good fortune of the Trapezuntines,  
 The prizewinner Eugenios together with Aquila,  
 Valerianos, and Kanidios.  
 And Christ Himself is providing you  
 With the reward of your immeasurable labors;  
 For He is giving out the crowns that you deserve.  
 And I, wretched that I am, filled with sin,  
 Make you intercessors for my salvation  
 In my desire to escape condemnation.

The poem fulfils several functions—praise of the martyrs, evocation of the pride of Trebizond in possessing their relics, description of the iconography in which Christ offers crowns to the martyrs, and the donor's prayer for intercession. The poet's comparison of the martyrs with "unbending pillars" reflects their upright stance and perhaps the colonnettes that separate their images, while his use of the adjective *λαμπρός* to characterize the "gleaming good fortune of the Trapezuntines" evokes not only the martyrs' fame but also the brilliant silver gilt of the casket. In the final three verses the donor asks the martyrs to intercede with Christ in order to obtain remission for his sins; the saints' hands are thus stretched out not only to receive their martyrs' crowns but also in prayers of intercession for the donor and for mankind.

The letters of the inscription are handsomely incised and easily legible, in part due to the inclusion of breathings and accents. The use of ligatures gave the engraver flexibility, so he could accommodate verses of variant length in the same space. The poem, of twelve dodecasyllable verses, begins with the sign of the cross in the middle of the front side of the casket, just to the right of the security clasp, and continues in the same band around the four sides of the casket; then the viewer needs to move his eye to the middle of the lower inscribed band where verses 7–12 continue. Each inscribed band on the long sides of the casket accommodates two verses, while the short sides have one verse each. The viewer would have to turn the reliquary around two times in his hands in order to read the inscription or, if it were placed on a table, might perhaps walk around it twice. In so doing he might utter aloud praise of the four martyrs and make a prayer to them to intercede for his salvation. The prayer was of course originally intended to be the supplication of the donor but, since he (or she) remains anonymous, it has universal application and can be appropriately repeated by any wretched sinner.

2. *The St. Demetrios Reliquary at Dumbarton Oaks*. My second example, a gold and enamel pendant reliquary at Dumbarton Oaks (Fig. 17), is also the smallest object examined in this study. It is attributed to thirteenth-century Thessalonike.<sup>35</sup> The obverse of the reliquary bears a bust of St. Demetrios, while the standing figures of Sts. Sergios and Bacchos are to be found on the reverse. Amazingly, this tiny object, less than 3 cm in

<sup>35</sup> M. C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Washington, D.C., 1965), 2:111–12, no. 160. J. Durand (ed., *Byzance: L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* [Paris, 1993], 445) concurs in assigning the reliquary to the 13th century. For a similar reliquary, see D. Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* (London, 1994), no. 200.

diameter, or the size of a pillbox, accommodates a four-verse epigram: two lines on the obverse and two running around the side. The quatrain may be translated as follows:

The faith of Sergios carries the venerable receptacle  
Of Demetrios's blood together with the balm.  
He asks to have you as protector, while he is living and when he is dead,  
Along with the two martyrs who have won the prize [of glory].

These verses inform us that the reliquary belonged to a certain Sergios, who included the effigy of his patron saint, together with his companion Bacchos, on the reverse, even though the reliquary was primarily dedicated to St. Demetrios and contained *myron* or perfumed oil from his tomb in Thessalonike. The poem is essentially Sergios's prayer to all three saints to protect him in life and to help him attain salvation after death.

#### *D. Liturgical Vessels*

*The Steatite Panagiaron from the Panteleimon Monastery on Mt. Athos.* I conclude this survey of epigrams appearing in context with yet another category of objects—liturgical vessels. The fourteenth-century steatite panagiaron from the Panteleimon monastery on Mt. Athos (Fig. 18),<sup>36</sup> unfortunately now lost, exemplifies an ideal collaboration between poet and artisan, and perhaps patron as well. As Ioli Kalavrezou has remarked, both in iconography and in form the green twelve-lobed bowl-shaped paten closely resembles the ribbed melon domes to be found in Palaiologan churches such as the Kariye Cami. As is appropriate for a panagiaron (a type of paten used for the bread that monks offered to the Virgin Panagia at mealtime or during the *orthros* service), the central medallion contains an image of the Virgin holding the Christ child; each lobe holds the bust of a prophet. Although only 9 cm in diameter, the paten teems with inscriptions, including eight dodecasyllable verses. The first two verses frame the central medallion and read as follows:

O Mother without a husband, Virgin who nourishes an infant,  
May you protect Alexios Komnenos Angelos.

This couplet refers to the iconography of the central roundel, evoking a sense of wonderment at the mystery of the virgin birth; at the same time it is a prayer on behalf of the donor of the panagiaron, the emperor Alexios III Komnenos of Trebizond (1349–90).

The second metrical inscription runs around the border of the panagiaron; the lobed design greatly increases the amount of space available for the carving of letters. Each of the six verses is divided between two lobes. The poem reads as follows:

The meadow and the plants and the light with three rays.  
The stone is a meadow and the row of prophets are the plants.  
The three beams are Christ, the bread and the Virgin.  
The maiden lends flesh to the Word of God,  
And Christ by means of bread distributes salvation  
And strength to Alexios Komnenos Angelos.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Steatite*, 83–85, 206–8; Talbot, "Epigrams," 145–46 and n. 54, where I mistakenly assigned the panagiaron to Chilandar.

<sup>37</sup>The translation is that of Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Steatite*, 206.

As Kalavrezou has pointed out, the verses evoke the green color of the steatite in their allusion to the stone as meadow and the prophets as plants. The poem also explains the iconography and its suitability for a paten on which the bread of salvation was offered. The final couplet assures the imperial patron of his future salvation.

These metrical inscriptions, combined with the identifying labels of each prophet and the text on each scroll, take up fully half of the paten and perform an important decorative and aesthetic function, accentuating the central roundel and the lobed border and defining the space for each image. At the same time they enhance the viewer's appreciation of the steatite material and the understanding of the iconography. The circular and lobed design of the inscriptions adds yet another dimension: as with the Trebizond and St. Demetrios reliquaries, in order to read the lines of poetry the viewer would have to turn the paten around in his hands twice, no doubt sounding the verses out loud; in so doing he would utter a prayer to the Virgin for protection of the emperor Alexios and would reiterate Christ's assurance of salvation. This process closely resembles the action of a visitor to the Pammakaristos parekklesion, who might sound out the lengthy inscriptions on exterior and interior cornices.

This sample of surviving metrical inscriptions from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has demonstrated that epigrams were painted, carved, or engraved on objects of various types and in different media; in addition to the cited examples in or on stone, mosaic, painted icons, fresco, steatite, metal, and enamel, numerous epigrams are preserved in illuminated manuscripts.<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, even relatively small objects could accommodate surprisingly long poems, and there seems to be no limit to the length of an epigram destined for a building: the epigram on the cornice of the sixth-century church of St. Polyeuktos was seventy-six lines,<sup>39</sup> and the north facade of a Palaiologan church in Mistra once held eighty-seven dodecasyllable verses.<sup>40</sup>

I hope to have shown that metrical inscriptions had an aesthetic function in the overall decorative scheme of a building or object, being allotted a significant amount of space and a strategic location and being carefully and artfully executed. They might add color or ornament, and often accented spatial divisions. At the same time, with some exceptions the content of the epigrams that survive *in situ* does little to express aesthetic appreciation of the structure or artifact. The poems considered so far, especially those on the funerary monuments and the icons, are primarily dedicatory and commemorative, or prayers for intercession, intended to stimulate the viewer's spiritual response.

## II. EPIGRAMS KNOWN ONLY FROM ANTHOLOGIES

In only a few cases, such as the Panteleimon panagiarion and the Trebizond reliquary, does one find verses that are more exegetical and ecphrastic in nature. Thus, in order to understand better how inscribed epigrams might have reflected or stimulated a more

<sup>38</sup>E.g., Patmos gr. 81, fols. 16v, 98v, 238v; cf. A. D. Kominis, *Patmos: Treasures of the Monastery* (Athens, 1988), 319–20, 322, pls. 41, 42, 44.

<sup>39</sup>R. M. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraghane in Istanbul* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 1:5–8, 407–11; idem, *A Temple for Byzantium* (Austin, Tex., 1989), 33–34.

<sup>40</sup>The church of the Panagia of Panori, now destroyed; cf. G. Millet, "Inscriptions byzantines de Mistra," *BCH* 23 (1899): 150–54.



aesthetic form of viewer response to an object, one needs to supplement the foregoing sample of surviving epigrams by returning to Manuel Philes and looking at a few of his poems that have become separated from their context and are preserved only in anthologies. Our appreciation of these verses will be increased if we try to place them in context by pairing them with existing works of art similar to those evoked by the epigrams. Space permits examination of only two types of such epigrams—those that enhance the viewer's response to the icons of certain saints and those that allude to the materials of carved precious stones.

#### *A. Epigrams on Icons*

Turning first to iconography, we might compare a quatrain entitled “On an icon of the Forty Holy Martyrs, adorned by Athanasios the Monk”<sup>41</sup> with the fourteenth-century miniature mosaic icon of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste exhibited at Dumbarton Oaks (Fig. 19). These Early Christian martyrs were condemned to stand in an icy lake until they froze to death; the icon shows them half-naked, shivering and clutching themselves, as their martyrs' crowns descend from heaven. Philes's poem, probably engraved on a silver-gilt frame, reads as follows:

The spiritual ardor of Athanasios warms  
Your hands paralyzed by cold,  
So that in recompense to him you may  
Worthily extend [them in supplication] to the Lord.

The monk hopes that his fervent prayer may warm up the freezing martyrs enough that they will unclench their arms and extend them in prayer to the Lord above. This sentiment draws the viewer's attention to the martyrs' tense bodies and increases his empathy with their suffering in the frigid waters. The epigram might also encourage the viewer's anticipation that at any moment the martyrs will miraculously relax their arms and raise them in prayer to heaven.<sup>42</sup>

Five of Philes's poems<sup>43</sup> relate to an icon of St. Onouphrios, an Egyptian hermit who is generally represented as totally naked, his only protection from the elements being his long white beard and his body hair,<sup>44</sup> as can be seen, for example, in a fresco from the church of Calendžicha (Fig. 20). At least three of the poems were designed as alternative choices for a silver-gilt icon frame commissioned by a certain Basil.<sup>45</sup> The epigrams focus on Onouphrios's nudity; one quatrain includes the word γυμνός or its cognate in each of its four lines:

O naked one, thrice-blessed and well adorned, may you adorn me  
Who am garbed in nakedness of good [deeds];  
Even better, O lover of nudity, may you show me  
Your suppliant stripped naked of shameful passions.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Escorial, no. 79, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:35.

<sup>42</sup> For an earlier epigram on the Forty Martyrs that encourages viewer response, see Maguire (*Byzantine Epigram*, 12–13), who discusses the verses accompanying a wall painting at Asinou.

<sup>43</sup> Paris, nos. 52–54, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 2:93–94; Florence, no. 38, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:214; Florence, no. 129, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:319 (on John Chrysostom and Onouphrios).

<sup>44</sup> *ODB* 3:1527.

<sup>45</sup> Paris, nos. 52–54, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 2:93–94.

<sup>46</sup> Florence, no. 38, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:214.

Philes delights in wordplay on the theme of nudity, commenting in another of the poems that the golden icon revetment will cover the saint's nakedness.<sup>47</sup> The poet also contrasts Onouphrios's nakedness with that of Adam, and expresses the hope that the donor Basil, who has been "naked to shame"<sup>48</sup> and is "garbed in nakedness of good [deeds]," will be "stripped naked of shameful passions."<sup>49</sup> Basil was evidently depicted on the frame as a standing donor figure;<sup>50</sup> one can assume that the viewer's response to the wordplay on "clothed" and "naked" would have been enhanced by the contrast between the fully garbed figure of Basil on the frame, decrying his spiritual "nakedness of good deeds," and the figure of Onouphrios, who is totally nude yet garbed in silver-gilt revetment.

### *B. Epigrams on Glyptics*

My final examples are drawn from a series of epigrams on glyptics, the carvings in semi-precious stone, which delighted Philes and the patrons who commissioned his poems. I assume that most of these epigrams were designed for metal frames surrounding the carvings and were not cut on the stones themselves.

Rock crystal (called in Greek λίθος κρύος, "cold rock," or κρύσταλλος, "ice") particularly intrigued Philes, as can be seen from a poem on an image of Christ, which may have been similar to the carving now housed in the Benaki Museum (Fig. 21):<sup>51</sup>

This stone is water, not really stone;  
He Who freezes flowing water into ice  
Also freezes this into the nature of stone  
Lest the rock melt and flow away.<sup>52</sup>

Thus it is Christ's image on the crystal that miraculously keeps it from melting. Elsewhere Philes alludes to the sparkle of crystal, which he terms a "fiery coal,"<sup>53</sup> well illustrated in the late antique piece of crystal preserved in the curious assemblage in the Treasury of San Marco, called the Grotto of the Virgin.<sup>54</sup>

Another type of stone favored by carvers was jasper or heliotrope, with colored veins running through it; a particularly fine example is the heliotrope cameo of Christ now housed in the Kremlin in Moscow (Fig. 22).<sup>55</sup> In a poem on a jasper *enkolpion* of Daniel, with green and red veins, Philes exclaims:

The stone is wet, but I see fire within.  
The stone contains fire, the flame contains dew.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Paris, nos. 52.6–7, 54.6, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 2:93–94.

<sup>48</sup> Paris, no. 52.4.

<sup>49</sup> Florence, no. 38.1 and 4.

<sup>50</sup> Paris, no. 52.8: 'Ο Βασίλειος οὗτος ἐστὼς ἐνθάδε; Paris, no. 53.9: 'Ο Βασίλειος οὗτος ἐστὼς ἐγγύθεν.

<sup>51</sup> Benaki Museum, no. 2113; cf. A. R. Bromberg, *Gold of Greece: Jewelry and Ornaments from the Benaki Museum* (Dallas, Tex., 1990), 84, pl. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Escorial, no. 86, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:38.

<sup>53</sup> Appendix, no. 59.3, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 2:420. For other poems on rock crystal, see Escorial, no. 87, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:38; and Paris, nos. 19–21, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 2:65–66.

<sup>54</sup> Buckton, *Treasury of San Marco*, 117–20, no. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Bank, *Byzantine Art*, 298 and fig. 152.

<sup>56</sup> Escorial, no. 107.1–2, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:50.

Another epigram, entitled “On the great Demetrios represented on a stone with red veins,” reads as follows:

Your throat is dyed red from your slaughter,  
The tip of the sword is also dyed red;  
For you in being slain yourself slew the error,  
O new kind of victim, O slayer who lives in stone!<sup>57</sup>

These verses suggest that the artisan may have masterfully designed his carving so that one red vein of the stone coincided with Demetrios’s slit throat, while another indicated the bloody tip of his slayer’s sword—or perhaps this effect was achieved by carving away the top layer of a stone like sardonyx, as was done in a cameo of St. George and St. Demetrios now in Paris (Fig. 23).<sup>58</sup>

### CONCLUSION

I would argue that most of the epigrams discussed here were created *de novo*, expressly to accompany the buildings or objects evoked. This is an obvious conclusion in the case of the dedicatory and funerary epigrams; it can also be inferred in such instances as the poem on St. Demetrios, cited immediately above, in which a carved stone with calculated placement of red veins is described, or the Panteleimon panagiarion in which the verses explain the iconography of the object in such detail. In cases where alternative versions or “trial pieces” of an epigram survive, as in Philes’s poem on an icon of St. Onouphrios, one can also assume that the verses were commissioned to order by a donor for a specific object. A possible exception to this pattern is Philes’s epigram on the cameo of Christ in rock crystal, which could in theory be reused for the frame of any similar carving.<sup>59</sup>

The majority of the epigrams examined here seem then to have been specifically commissioned, and thus involved an interaction among patron, artisan/architect, and poet.<sup>60</sup> Recent scholarship has emphasized the dominant role of the patron in the creation of medieval works of art and literature; and, indeed, epigrams (and prose inscriptions as well) credit the patron rather than the artist with the creative act. Many patrons, speaking in the first person through the ghostwriter poet, take credit not only for writing the verses, but for producing the work of art as well.<sup>61</sup>

One must assume that the patron decided on the type of object or building he or she wished to commission, such as a commemorative monument, or an ex-voto offering in thanksgiving for healing or in hope of future salvation. The patron then selected the

<sup>57</sup> Escorial, no. 281, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:136–37.

<sup>58</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles; see Durand, *Byzance*, no. 193. I am grateful to Martin Dennert for suggesting this comparison.

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion of this phenomenon of reused epigrams with an “autonomous existence,” see Maguire, *Byzantine Epigram*, 6–14.

<sup>60</sup> This is the second of the two scenarios postulated by Maguire in his *Byzantine Epigram*, according to which “the poet . . . compose[d] the epigram on the basis of close knowledge of the work of art on which it is inscribed” (p. 6).

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Escorial, no. 156, ed. Miller, *Carmina*, 1:66–67, for a poem on an icon of the Virgin written by Philes on behalf of Manuel Atzymes, in which Atzymes is made to say, “I paint thee with the hand of an icon-painter” (v. 16) and “Thy <servant> Manuel Atzymes says these words” (v. 23).

appropriate artisan/architect and no doubt had some say in the materials, iconography, and design of an object or structure. The patron might have his role commemorated through a portrait as did Metochites at Chora and Akropolites on the Tretyakov icon frame, or through epigrams as did Maria-Martha at Pammakaristos and Manuel Dishypatos on the Freising icon frame, or perhaps through both portraiture and verse or prose inscription as on the Makrinitza bas-relief. If the patron wished to have an epigram included in or on the object, he might hire a poet to produce verses with the desired sentiments, expressing family pride, thanksgiving for healing, prayer for intercession, exegesis of the iconography, or whatever the occasion demanded; it is also conceivable that the patron might have written the epigram himself. The writer would have to coordinate his efforts with the plans of the architect or artisan, to get some idea of how long an epigram might fit in the design. Then the skill of the engraver or stone carver would be called into play, to plan the cutting of the letters so that they would fit into the prescribed space. His task was eased by the flexibility provided by the use of ligatures and abbreviations, but he would still have to plan his work meticulously.

The composition of epigrams for *frames* may have followed a somewhat different procedure. I would argue that frames were often commissioned for already existing works of art, such as icons or carved stones; as in the case of the Freising icon, some of these objects may in fact have been centuries old.<sup>62</sup> Under these circumstances both patron and poet would be responding to a work of art in front of them, rather than one still in conceptual form; it is therefore not surprising that this would lead to a more aesthetic evocation of the iconography and materials. Thus I would argue that many of the Palaiologan ecphrastic epigrams known only from anthologies were originally intended for frames. Since these frames or revetments were primarily fashioned of silver gilt, they were particularly vulnerable to being melted down for the content of their precious metals.<sup>63</sup> I would therefore suggest that it is not mere coincidence that few *inscriptional* ecphrastic epigrams are preserved *in situ*.

Because of the relative paucity of ecphrastic epigrams surviving on the objects for which they were intended, one must resort to the pages of anthologies for fuller understanding of this genre of poetry. At the same time, examination of the preserved inscriptional epigrams where one can actually see the interplay between poetry and art can provide a better imaginative context for reading the epigrams of Philes and other poets.

#### Dumbarton Oaks

<sup>62</sup>In addition to the Freising icon, one could cite the 11th-century steatite icon of St. Nicholas from Mt. Sinai, with a painted frame of the Palaiologan period; cf. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Steatite*, 30, 106–7, and pl. 10. But the reverse could also occur, as in the example of the 15th-century icon of the Crucifixion in Moscow (cited by Maguire, *Byzantine Epigram*, 23), in which a 12th-century poem was reused, in revised form, on the frame.

<sup>63</sup>Moreover, if a frame was made of wood revetted with silver gilt, it was susceptible to dry rot or being eaten by worms; cf. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Steatite*, 29.